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ABSTRACT

This publication presents translated messages from children in Afghanistan presented at a special session of the United Nations in September 2001. Compiled and funded by The Save the Children Alliance members working for Afghanistan, the booklet begins with the text of Articles 12 and 13 relating to participation of The Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children's spoken or written messages translated from Dori or Pashtu follow and relate to participation at home and in their country, survival in the midst of war, the need for protection, and the need for opportunities to promote their own development. The children's messages are accompanied by their drawings and by photographs of the children themselves. The final section of the publication describes a Children's Consultation Kit, developed to assist adults in communicating more effectively with Afghan children; the kit was piloted among groups of Afghan refugee children in Peshawar, Pakistan during January and February 2001, and used in Afghan cities in May and June 2001. The publication concludes with comments from adults who have used the Children's Consultation Kit. (KB)

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ED 465 450

Afghanistan's Children

Speak to the UN Special Session

19th - 21st September 2001

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THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989

Articles relating to Participation

Article 12

1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression, this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Contents

Children's address to the Assembly

Children's messages on Child Rights:

- Participation
- Survival
- Protection
- Development

Learning through Consultation

This publication was initiated and funded by The Save the Children Alliance members working for Afghanistan, and supported by the Afghanistan GMC (Global Movement for Children) Working Group.

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Art work: Afghan children
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The Children of Afghanistan, address the Special Session with this urgent message:

Our childhood is passing. There has been war and drought in our country for so long now. Many of us have had to leave our homes and many have died. Each year there is more sickness and poverty. Though you have come and heard our stories many times, we do not see anything changing for us, and we do not know what you are doing with our stories.

Now the organisations supporting us have consulted us and we are sending you our messages and drawings . Please share these at your Special Session and then tell us your plans so that we can work together for our future.

These are some of our photos taken while we were preparing our messages for you. We wrote and spoke them in Dari and Pashtu. The translations in this book have kept as closely as possible to our own words.

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Participation

'I want to build my country with my knowledge and awareness'
Boy in Herat, Afghanistan

'Don't make me say the truth
or I shall be hanged.
Nobody will take the side of truth'.
Child in Afghanistan

We must create opportunities
for education and show
what we can do by using our awareness.'
Child in Afghanistan

**'I want to let my nation know that peace is the best thing
and they should think about it.'**
Girl in Herat, Afghanistan

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We Want to Participate

A group of street working children in Kabul sit together and share concerns about their situation and their need to be heard and included .

Sardar:
Is there an organisation or institution that can take care of the children who have been affected by war and are suffering from the hardships of war?

Wasim:
The people say that there are many organisations that work for the well being of children around the world. Maybe they do not know anything about the children of Afghanistan.

Nazif:
How can they not know! They have visited us many times. They have taken our names many times. Many surveys have been done on children. Every day there are news items and comments on the radio about children.

Hamid:
We are just poor people. Who are we to talk like this? Who will listen to us. Our talk doesn't have any value or importance.

Najmuddin:
OK. So we are poor and living in very harsh conditions, but we are still human beings! Everybody knows that the poor are vulnerable and that the poor always die poor.

Neamat:
That is true. If somebody does not have any food and tells another person who does have food, his talk will be meaningless to him. He will hear it and think of it as a puzzle.

Fawad:
You are right. Only the person who has been poor and unhappy can understand what it is to have nothing.

Nasir:
Brothers! We have talked all this through and shared our pain and grief. If there is anyone listening, they will hear it and I am sure that when they hear it, they will take some steps to help us solve our problems. Eventually these actions will reach us.

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No Participation at home

'My father always buys clothes for me which my mother wants me to wear, without ever asking me.'
14 year old blind refugee girl in Peshawar, Pakistan

'My mother believes that girls make wrong decisions and so she doesn't listen to me.'
Girl in Kabul, Afghanistan

'I could not talk in front of my father, because I am afraid of him.'
Street working refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

'My mother forces me to wash the dishes. There is no choice. I cannot choose what I eat or wear.'
Refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

'In the family no one knows about our wills. That is to say father, mother and other elders do not allow us to talk.'
Street working refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

'Being disabled my family does not listen to me. Because of this I am almost refusing to eat the food they give me. The children of my own age won't let me join their games because I am disabled.'
Disabled child in Mazar, Afghanistan

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Participation at home

'I love to be respected. We all need respect.'
Child in Kabul, Afghanistan

'When I am a father I want to listen to my children and consider their hopes, and expect their ideas.'
Refugee boy in Peshawar, Pakistan

'My parents cannot read or write, but they say that whatever we want to be is our choice and they will be proud of us.'
Refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

'Whenever my mother buys me new clothes I can accept or reject wearing it, and in this case my mother returns it and will bring one which I like.'
Refugee girl in NWFP, Pakistan

'Whether the cloth is good or bad, life goes on. I like the colours my mother chooses for me, and the aim is to get your body covered!'
Street working refugee girl in Peshawar, Pakistan

'Our family elders listen to what we have to say. They also advise us not to smoke hashish, take snuff or steal things. They tell us not to fight with others and to keep ourselves clean.'
Street working refugee boy in Quetta, Pakistan

'When it comes to me making decisions, it depends what I have to decide and if I think I can manage it or not.'
Street working refugee boy in Quetta, Pakistan

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Survival

'If we want to survive
we should get rid of bullets,
pistols, fighter planes and war.'
Child in Afghanistan

'To be alive and fresh
like a flower I need food.'
Refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

' Drought has brought a lot of trouble and hardship.
We don't have wheat and our wells are dry.'
Child in Herat, Afghanistan

Clean water is the most
important thing in our lives.
Child in Afghanistan

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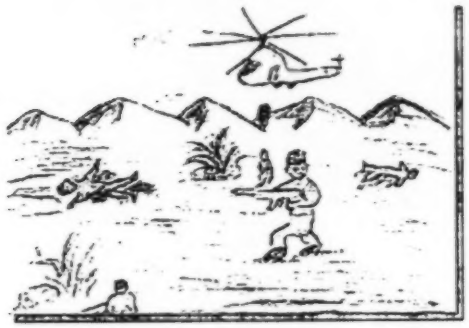
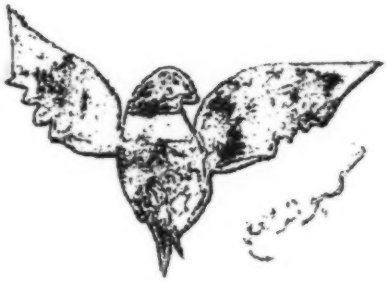
'What is happening to our country?'



What is happening to our country,
That some of us are burning,
And others are benefiting?
Our country is broken into pieces.
Yet still I remember my broken land,
And cry for it.

In our country nobody grows old,
Because everybody is dying.
How long must this be?
My heart is full of blood.
Even if I will be hanged
I will keep writing my poems
And colour the pages with my words.
Child in Afghanistan



Peace is not sold
anywhere in the world,
Otherwise I would have bought
it for my country.
Girl in Afghanistan

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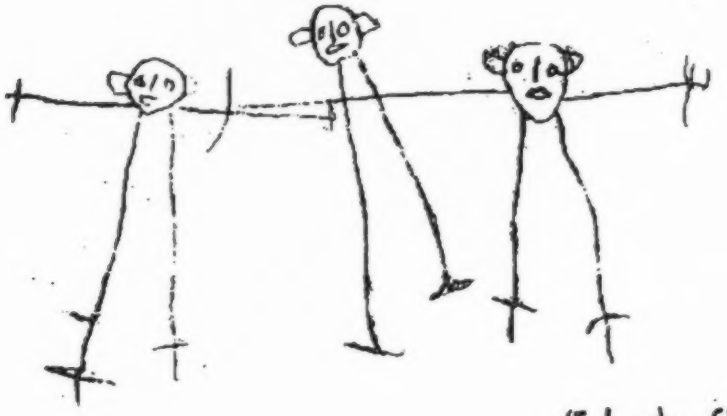
KABUL

Kabul is the land of flowers,
But the birds no longer go there,
For when they see Kabul
They come away with falling tears.

Girl in Afghanistan



'I hate fighting'

I hate fighting. Once I was walking on a path.
Suddenly I stopped near a tree.
Two birds were fighting on the branches of that tree.
In the end they both fell down and a cat ate both of them.
This is what fighting does!.

Child in Afghanistan

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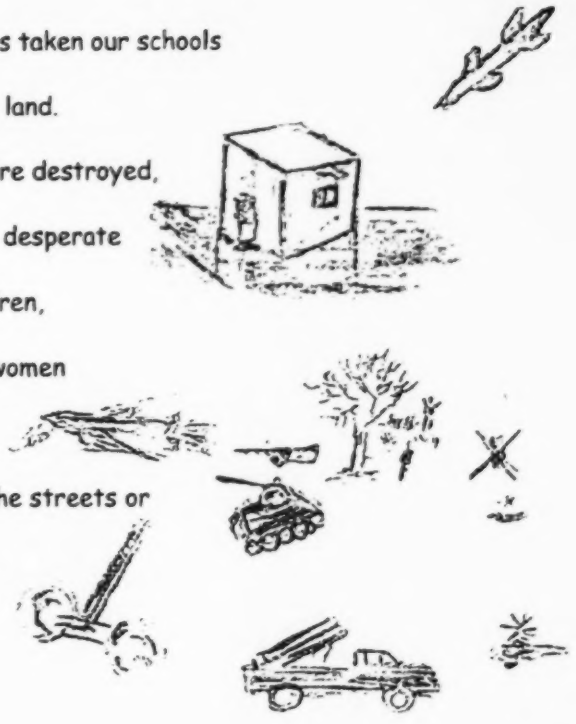
'War is causing all our troubles'

War is causing all our troubles. It has taken our schools and our houses and made us leave our land.

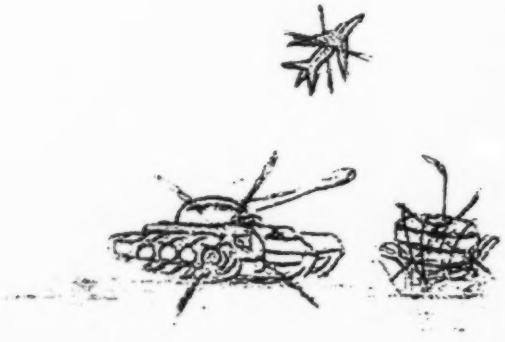
The hospitals are ruined, the farms are destroyed, the children become orphans and the desperate families are forced to sell their children, the people become disabled and the women are left widowed and traumatized.

The children are forced to work on the streets or go to Iran and Pakistan to find work.

Street working child in Kabul, Afghanistan



'It has destroyed our country'



It is difficult for us because we don't have clean, drinkable water and health-care centres. The reason for this is the war continuing now for more than twenty years. It has destroyed our country and taken away our right for a peaceful life.

Child in Afghanistan

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Protection

'Even though the enemy is strong, the guardian is stronger'
Child in Afghanistan

'I want to live in my own house
and stay in one place'
IDP child in Kabul, Afghanistan

'Woman in house or woman in tomb'
Girl in Afghanistan

'Sometimes I feel
the hard work hurts my body'
Refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

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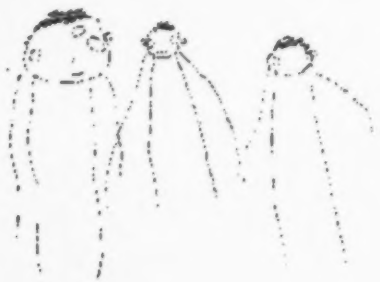
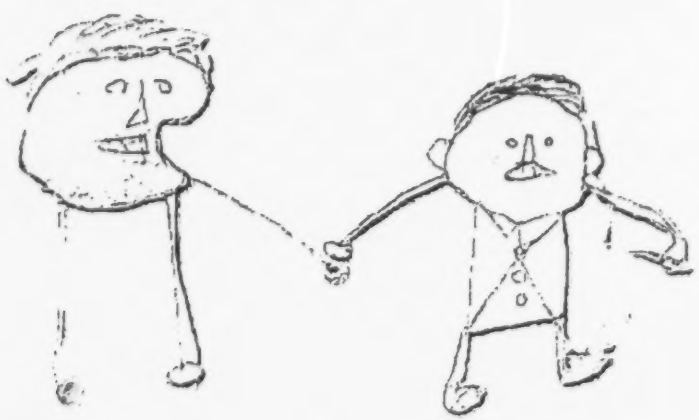
Parents & Guardians

When I am a parent I would not leave my children to be sad. We should not let children keep sadness in their hearts.

Refugee child in Peshawar- Pakistan



We need a guardian to be able to live. God willing, the food can be found anywhere at any time. But if we have no guardian how can we live?



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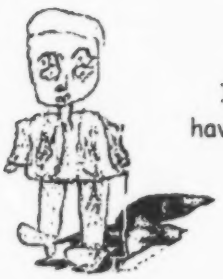
'My father was killed'

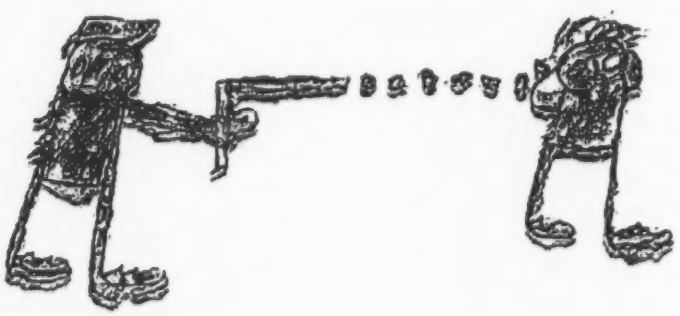


I want to grow up as quickly as I can so that I can have a gun and find my father's killer. And I will kill him because he killed my father.

9 year old boy from Panjsher Valley, Afghanistan

My father was killed by a customer. He had a bakery. The customer wanted first turn for his bread and when my father didn't agree, he killed him. We spent a lot of money to save his life but it didn't help, he didn't live.

Refugee girl in Peshawar- Pakistan



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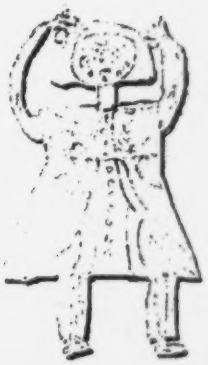
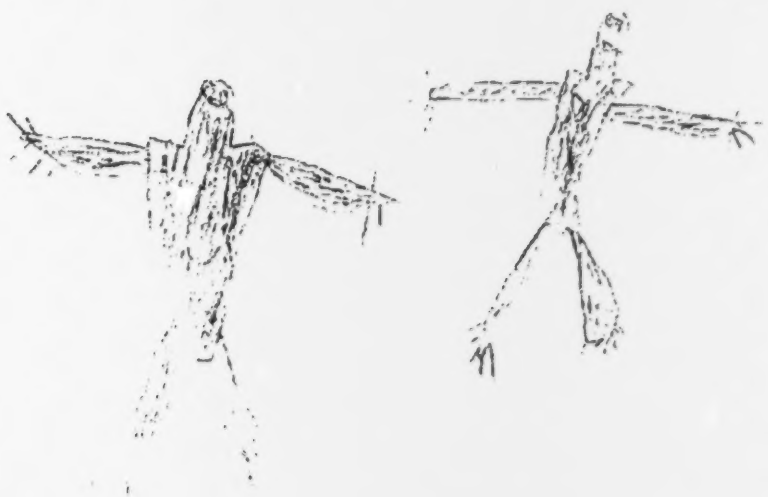
'I was married in exchange'



My father married a girl and I was married in exchange. I had been happy with my friends. Now I have a lot of work to do at my husband's house. I did not want to marry. I was put in a car and driven to my husband's home. Now I am always sick. I feel the presence of spirits and ghosts. I pull my hair. I want to run to the hills but the people don't allow me to. I want to leave this place. Don't take my friends to their husband's houses.

12 year old refugee girl in Qutub Khal camp,
Peshawar- Pakistan



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Working Children

I work because we are poor and I don't have another choice. I would like to go to school like other children do and study, but we cannot afford the fees.

Street working refugee boy in Peshawar, Pakistan

I am working with my father to earn money. I don't go to school because I don't have time. I have to provide food for my family.

Boy in Logar, Afghanistan

I am not going to school because I have the duty of looking after our cow. I feed it and bring water for it.

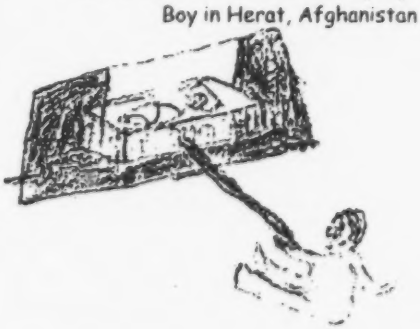
Child in Logar, Afghanistan

My father says that if the cow loses weight, " I will beat you. You have to keep the cow healthy." So I don't have time to play.

Boy in Herat, Afghanistan

I cannot play because my mother works and I have to look after her children otherwise she hits me with a stick.

13 year old girl in Logar, Afghanistan



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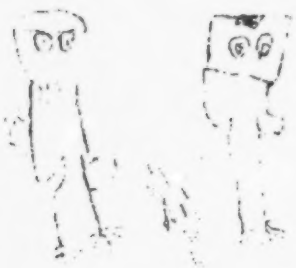
'I have to search the streets'

I don't work because I like it. My father is wea and old. He is not able to work. So my brother and have to search the streets to find bones, paper an plastics to sell, and make some money.

Street working refugee boy in Quetta - Pakista



'It is a filthy thing'

Collecting all these papers, metal, bone and leftovers is a filthy thing. Every time we get hurt and get something like a needle in our feet.

Street working refugee boy in Quetta. Pakistan

'We should be protected'

When I was gathering garbage I was arrested by the police, they took my money and hit me, they took me to the police station and they were tugging my ears. I think that one day we shall have our turn to take our revenge. We should be protected from the police and able to keep working. Inside Afghanistan we are tortured by war, outside we are tortured by the police.

Street working refugee boy in Peshawar

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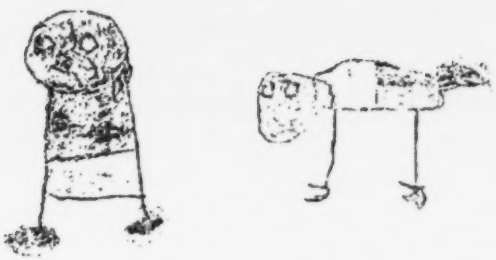
'I am afraid'



I am afraid of the dogs chasing me in the early morning when I take my cart to the selling point.

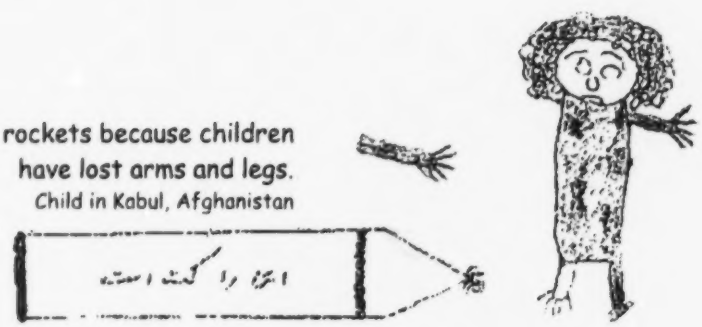
Street working refugee child in Peshawar, Pakistan

I am scared of bombs. I lost my leg because of a bomb explosion. We have to be protected from the gun. We wont be happy in our lives until the guns have been taken from the people.

Refugee boy in Peshawar, Pakistan

I hate the rockets because children have lost arms and legs.

Child in Kabul, Afghanistan



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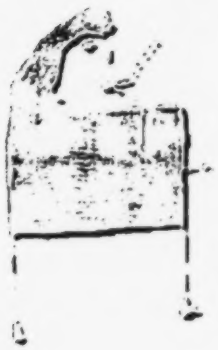
'People may kidnap me'

I am afraid because people may kidnap me and sell me, or they may take out a part of my body to sell. They may make me smuggle drugs in my body. The lady who tried to kidnap me was beautifully dressed and offered me chocolates.

Street working child in Kabul, Afghanistan



Drug addicts are dangerous,
my brother has been chased by one.

Street working refugee child in Peshawar

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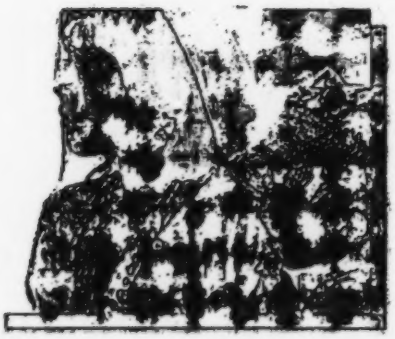
Development

'Human beings need a life of quality'

Child in Afghanistan



'It is binding for every Muslim to get educated but our leaders do not allow us to go to school.'

Girl in Afghanistan

'Ignorance is a tragedy for human beings, I write and I am crying out loudly. I will die, but my writing will remain as a memory.'

Child in Afghanistan

'Knowledge is the torch of life'

School child in Afghanistan

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'I want to play'

As play is the basic right of the child our parents should be asked to allow us to play. We have no playgrounds. Disabled children also have the right to play.

Refugee boy in Bhutti Camp, Pakistan

I want to play with my doll but my mother forbids me and says that girls should not play.

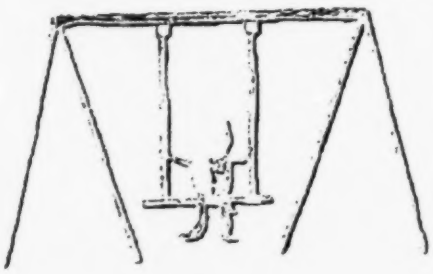
Girl in Logar, Afghanistan

I like to fly kites but my father doesn't let me , nor do I have time to play because I must collect water and wood and look after our cow.

Boy in Logar, Afghanistan

I sell dry bread and then when I get enough money I spend it on swinging and on other play things.

Refugee girl in Peshawar, Pakistan



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A Brightly Coloured Ball

I long for my country to have peace as soon as possible. I would love to go to school, study and play with friends of my own age. I want to become a good teacher and be able to teach my students the lessons of love and friendship. I would love to have several books and read them, but I have never had any beautiful books. I would love to have a brightly coloured ball and play with my little brother and sister, but I have no such ball. I would love to go with my father and brother to a beautiful grassy park and play with my lovely toys. Sadly I have never seen such toys because no-one in the city knows of such things, but I have heard my father talk of them.

12 year old boy in Herat, Afghanistan

Picnics

I can never remember going on a picnic, because for as long as I can remember there has been war and we have not been allowed to go on picnics. In our country there are big festivals, especially the 'Red Flower' Festival. But we unfortunately cannot celebrate it because of the war and also the economic problems.

Girl in Northern Afghanistan

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Children with disabilities should be integrated

As a disabled child this is my message, that all disabled children should be integrated in schools. The family should not identify us by our disability because that makes the disabled child feel sad and makes our disability greater. All disabled children should be integrated into schools.

Disabled girl in Mazar
Afghanistan

Disabled children should lead normal lives and develop as other children. I would ask mothers of disabled children to take them to wedding parties and ceremonies and let them go to school.

Disabled child in Mazar
Afghanistan

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'The Candle of Knowledge'

If someone lives in a desert

He will be like a dry stick.

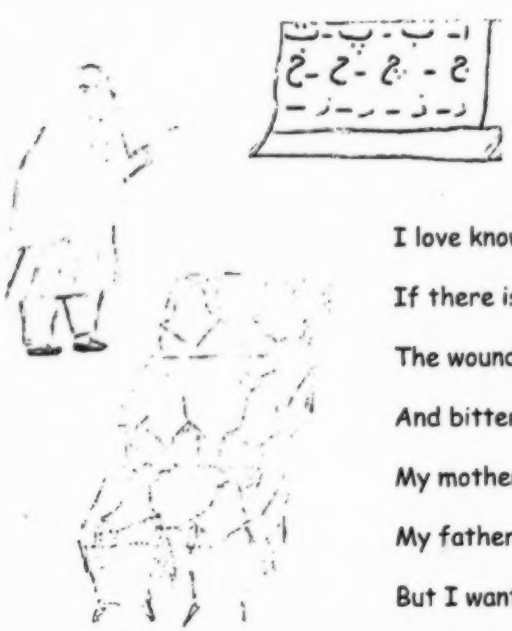
We Afghans live in the midst of war,

We are used to being hard.

The cause of war is lack of knowledge

We had no matches to light our candle of knowledge,

But others have lit it for us.



I love knowledge.

If there is this love,

The wounds will blossom into flowers.

And bitterness can become sweet.

My mother wants me to be a doctor

My father wants me to be a teacher

But I want to study literature.

Girl in Afghanistan

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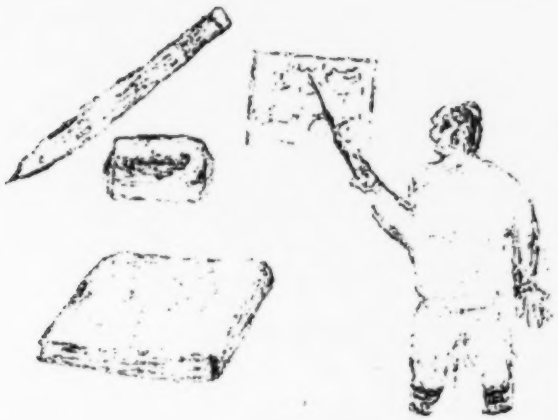
'Knowledge is a Treasure'



It is not good for me to sit in the corner of my house with nothing to do. We need schools. We can gain so much from our education. Knowledge is a treasure which can never run dry, however much you take from it. The person who does not have knowledge is like a donkey that does not know what it is carrying.

Girl in Afghanistan

If there were no teachers, there would be no knowledge. If the teachers would not struggle for us, how can we remove the mists of ignorance from our minds?

Girl in Afghanistan

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'Treat Daughters the same as Sons'

I want to continue my studies. But there are some strict families who oppose females studying. I am so sad hearing all this about girls' studying. I study the Holy Koran, but I also want to continue my school education, so that I could work for my people as the boys will in the future. But I really don't know why they think boys should be allowed, but not the girls who have to sit at home. These families say that studies are useless to girls and that they were created to just live at home. I ask these families to treat their daughters the same as they do their sons, because they both live in society together and they should share their problems and work together with each other. A man is not able to do everything alone. Men and women should help each other in any social, economic, cultural and scientific enterprise.

17 year old blind refugee girl in Peshawar, Pakistan

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'Our education is incomplete'

We need our education to be completed to the twelfth grade, and to become teachers of the future, to work for our country. But unfortunately the ground is not prepared for us, and our education is incomplete.

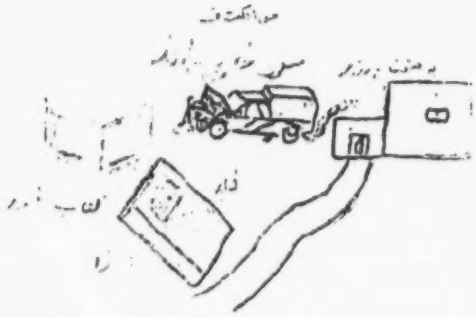
School child in Afghanistan

We want to be educated but the situation is not good for us, we can only go to the mosque and learn from the mullah.

Girl in Herat, Afghanistan

We go to school but it is not good because we only study religious subjects.

Boy in Logar, Afghanistan



We need skills along with education because we don't have any higher education classes. Otherwise we shall be jobless and unemployed.

Refugee school boy in Chashma Camp, Pakistan

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'Encouraging other girls'

I am a twelve year old girl. When I was a child my father took me to school and I was admitted to class one which I loved very much. But one day when I picked up my bag to go to school my father asked me to put it down because I was banned from going to school. I did not know the reason behind it at that time, but now I know I was banned from going because I was a girl. But I like to study. That is why I have been going to the house of one of our old teachers to continue studying there. Now I can read and write and I am also encouraging the other girls to come to her house and become educated.

12 year old girl in Herat, Afghanistan

'Active in my country's development'

I don't have pens and notebook and I need to be educated. My feet are bare and I have no clothes. My father is in prison and there is nobody else to take care of our family and provide for us. Our future holds only hardship. But despite all these difficulties I want to become a doctor. There is war in our country and I want to treat the injured people. But for now I must go barefoot searching for water daily because of the drought and our wells are empty. I look forward to peace, and for me to become active in my country's development.

Girl in Herat, Afghanistan

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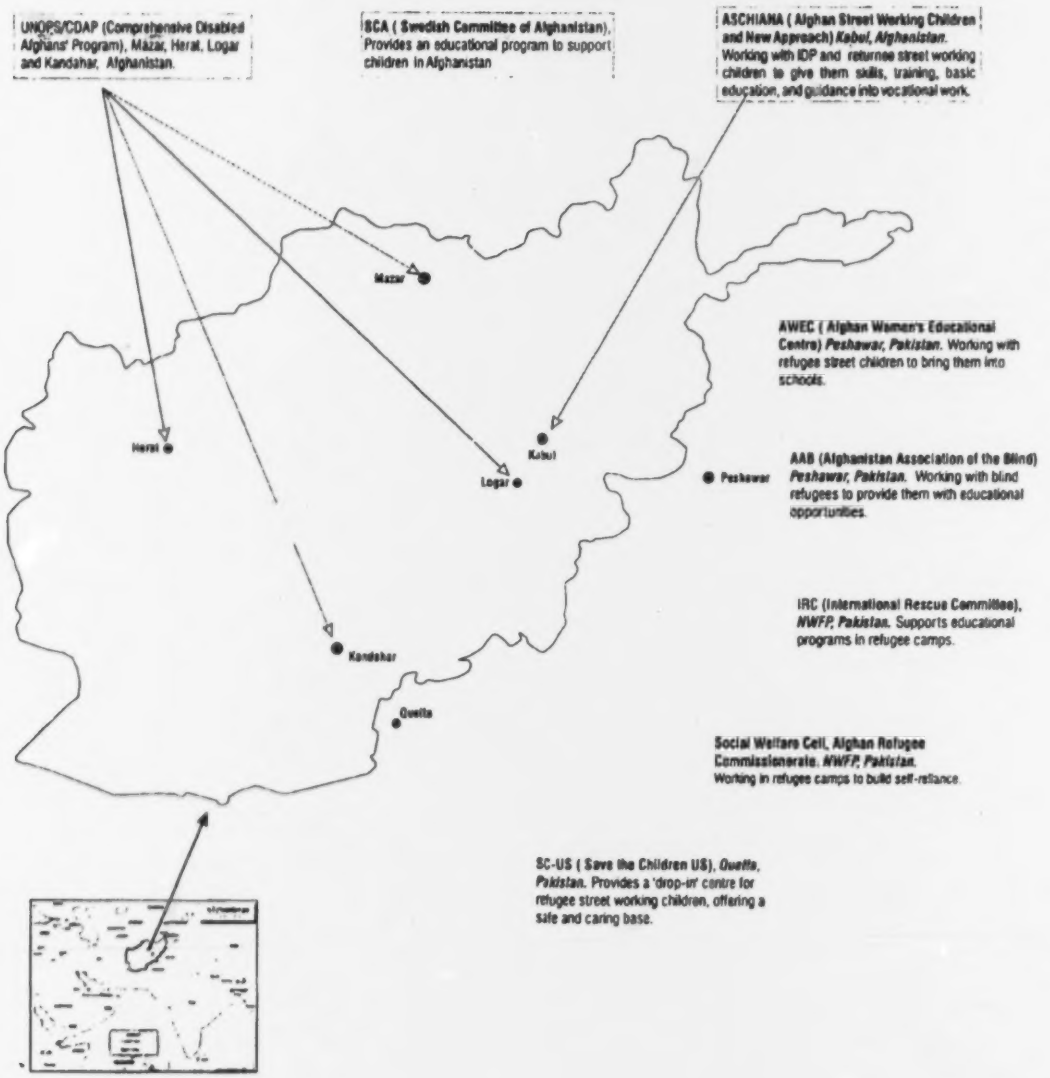
Learning through Consultation

A Children's Consultation Kit was developed by Save the Children, in collaboration with other NGOs, UNICEF and UNOPS/CDAP. This was a resource to assist adults in communicating more effectively with Afghan children, in preparation for UNGASS and the onward Global Movement for Children. It was piloted with groups of Afghan refugee children in Peshawar, Pakistan during January and February 2001, and used by the organisations in the localities shown on this map during May and June 2001.

Over 1,500 children took part through these consultations, and have contributed to this book.


UNOPS/CDAP (Comprehensive Disabled Afghans' Program), Mazar, Herat, Logar and Kandahar, Afghanistan.
SCA (Swedish Committee of Afghanistan), Provides an educational program to support children in Afghanistan
ASCHIANA (Afghan Street Working Children and New Approach) Kabul, Afghanistan. Working with IDP and returnee street working children to give them skills, training, basic education, and guidance into vocational work.
Mazar
Herat
Kabul
Logar
Peshawar
Kandahar
Quetta
AWEC (Afghan Women's Educational Centre) Peshawar, Pakistan. Working with refugee street children to bring them into schools.
AAB (Afghanistan Association of the Blind) Peshawar, Pakistan. Working with blind refugees to provide them with educational opportunities.
IRC (International Rescue Committee), NWFP, Pakistan. Supports educational programs in refugee camps.
Social Welfare Cell, Afghan Refugee Commissionerate. NWFP, Pakistan. Working in refugee camps to build self-reliance.
SC-US (Save the Children US), Quetta, Pakistan. Provides a 'drop-in' centre for refugee street working children, offering a safe and caring base.

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Consultation Kit for Afghan children: A starting point for Participation

Starting Point

The Global Movement for Children and the organisations working with Afghan children develop a Children's Consultation Kit. This gives suggestions and approaches for 'ice-breaker' games, role-plays, drawing activities, discussion topics and storytelling, to be used with groups of children. It is piloted and training is given in its use.

Afghan children and the organisations work together using the Children's Consultation Kit, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They prepare messages and drawings to be sent to UNGASS.

The messages and drawings are assembled into this book: 'Afghanistan's Children Speak to the Special Session, 19th - 21st September 2001'.

This book goes to UNGASS, carrying its messages from Afghan children and explaining the process in partnership that is being initiated among the organisations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

A report from UNGASS will be sent to the organisations, together with the agreed Child Rights Agenda for the coming decade.

A children's book will be prepared which will include both their own messages from this book and the messages from UNGASS. It will be given to the children who have been consulted, and used to encourage further participation.

The organisations share what they have learnt through consultation, and explore further initiatives supported by the Global Movement for Children.

Afghan children increase their participation, initiating ideas and taking action in a partnership with the organisations supported by the Global Movement for Children.

Information on other materials developed by the Global Movement for Children Afghanistan Working Group:

* The Children's Consultation Kit
* Video showing The Children's Consultation Kit being used with refugee children in Quetta, Afghanistan.
* Decade Review: "Lost Chances, The Changing situation of Children in Afghanistan, 1990-2000".

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Adults who used the Children's Consultation Kit talk about their experiences

" It helped us to work in a new way with children. The children could sense this. They sensed the importance we were giving to what they had to say and it changed the way they felt about themselves. It made them feel more valued" Quetta, Pakistan

"Although I have had lots of experience of working with children, I learnt to listen in a new way. It showed me how to work with kindness, and what a difference this made to my relationship with them." Quetta, Pakistan

" I had been anxious about using this new approach, I had always been shy and hesitant about putting myself in the children's shoes. But working in this new way built a whole new level of trust and respect, and the children did not take liberties." Kabul, Afghanistan

"I have been a teacher for 31 years. In all those years I had controlled the children by force and I would beat them. I was a dictator! But using this consultation kit changed me. I realised I could befriend the children. I used to be feared and hated. Now I am loved and trusted. Now the children know their rights, and so do I." Kabul, Afghanistan

" I used to relate to the children as an adult. Using this kit let me put myself into the child's shoes. I was able to understand them so much better. I could identify with the children as children. This made it possible for the children to share much more and express their wishes with confidence" Peshawar, Pakistan

"I realised the children on the streets have so much to teach us. Though they have nothing but their hopes to carry them towards a future, they find a way of surviving, earning and demonstrating their talents and abilities. Such a childhood can be very positive or it can be very negative. If we can give the support they need, then their experiences can be very positive, otherwise they can be channeled toward very destructive ends." Kabul, Afghanistan

"Using this kit was fun! The children's enjoyment really changed things! It showed us how to work with an idea and how to use their ideas. The children were able to talk openly. It showed us how to support the children in expressing their ideas and in this way we could be truly 'with' the children and not just 'for' them. We could come alongside them to help them make good choices. This approach could be used for others in the community. I have found it useful with my own children." Kandahar, Afghanistan

"Though I have been teaching for 20 years, it was through this approach that I learnt what it really means to participate. It is so difficult to get inside another person, but this let me do it. We need to be with the children, not above them. When you get close you build trust and the whole environment for learning is so much more fruitful. This sort of experience could be useful for our authorities!" Kandahar, Afghanistan

Global Movement for Children

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Afghanistan's children thank the UN General Assembly for calling this Special Session. They invite the UNGASS participants to enter

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